1:Murphy and Quain E-4,5 (1938) 1955
SP23 Trumai SP23

CHAPTER FOUR

Religious Beliefs and Practices

182 771 829 The lapse of many religious practices and the lessening of interest in those aspects of culture that we classify as religion were striking features of this dying society. Older informants rememered the time when there were ceremonial masks, the flute house, and other traits that are still found among certain tribes of the upper Xingú. Indeed, if it were not for Matiwana's unusual age, the Trumaí would be even more lacking in ceremonial knowledge. Yet there seems to have been little regret on the part of either the older or younger generations for this culture loss. They shrugged it off, saying that their grandfathers had had such [177] practices, but that they did not. This indifference is not too surprising, since much of their religion was borrowed from their upper Xingú neighbors not too long ago.[1]

791 105 Despite the decline in interest in the ceremonial cycle and the disappearance of certain religious traits, the main outlines of Trumaí religion were still observable in Quain's time. Shamanism was still practiced extensively, but it was simple both in form and supporting ideology. Ceremonialism was related to subsistence and curing. The shaman's individualized power resulted in a specialization of religious functions as did the individual ownership of ceremonial songs and dances. Some Trumaí, like old Matiwana, were better versed in the [193] religious rites than others, but they did not constitute a priestly class. While no one person interceded with the supernatural on behalf of the [182] whole village, the group ceremonials provided a focal point for social participation and village cooperation, and many of them were undertaken by the community for the benefit of all.

Shamanism

756 [184] The shamanistic art of curing was known and employed by nearly all the adult males of the village, and in this sense parallels the practices recorded among the Kamayurá by Oberg.[2] There is, however, a type

[1] Kamayurá ceremonial and religious life, much of which was once shared by the Trumaí, is discussed by Oberg (1953) and Galvão (1949, 1950). The extent of Trumaí culture loss can be roughly inferred from these sources and from the work of the earlier ethnologists.

[2] Oberg 1953, p. 60.

1:Murphy and Quain E-4,5 (1938) 1955
SP23 Trumai SP23

Deities and Mythology

The Trumaí were certainly not preoccupied with the supernatural. Quain makes no mention of the spirit owners of animal, plant, and fish species that figure so prominently in the Kamayurá belief system, nor does he speak of the "*ole* spirits" attributed to the Trumaí by Oberg.[8] Beliefs, which are a more covert part of culture, are particularly difficult for an ethnographer who lacks familiarity with the language to learn about, and it is understandable that Quain's notes are weak on this point.

Magic, except for sorcery, was not observed by Quain, unless shamanistic curing is considered a magical practice. No objects, such as charms or amulets, were thought to have a magical effect, and the already discarded ceremonial objects were the only inanimate items that could be said to have some inherent religious value. In short, the day-to-day world of the Trumaí was little influenced by extra-corporeal forces or personages. The deities were nearly all culture heroes and creators, who did their work in the dim past of the "grandfathers of all the Trumaí."

With some variation the mythology of the Trumaí was quite similar to that of the Kamayurá. The most important of the Trumaí creation deities was Sun (Atehle). This was not the visible, celestial sun. The Trumaí explained that the celestial sun was only the *ation* (pet) of the real Sun, who was important in all the creation myths. Sun no longer actively intervened in life, but in the days of the creation he was an anthropomorphic personage having great supernatural powers. Sun's mother was the wife of Panther (Fetde), who appears in the tales of the after life. This woman, in turn, was the daughter of Wamutsini, or Grandfather. The latter had an important part in the creation, for he was the original deity from whom the other supernaturals sprang. Wamutsini's daughter was not important in these stories.

The identity and character of Moon were ill-defined. At one time Moon was in the heavens with Sun, who, however, became angry with him and cast him out to his present isolated position. Moon was once eaten by Awalanaxe, a fish. Sun, upon learning of this, made a fishhook, caught Awalanaxe, and disembowelled him. Moon was found inside quite chewed up, but Sun molded him back into shape. A fly then crawled up the nostril of the unconscious Moon causing him to sneeze. He thought that he had merely been asleep, but Sun explained that he had been eaten.

Moon's sex was highly ambivalent, being a male in some tales and a female in others. He was not, however, important as a creator. Awalanaxe appeared frequently in the mythology as did Wakpanehene, another fish.

[8] Oberg 1953, p. 54.

1:Murphy and Quain E-4,5 (1938) 1955
SP23 Trumai SP23

105 serious damage to the individual personality. Also, many individuals could not enact whole sets of kin-determined roles because they had no relatives of the proper complementary status. For example, parents-in-law normally exerted considerable influence and control over younger married couples, but hardly anyone in the village had such relatives. Similarly, cross-cousin marriage was the preferred union, but cross-cousins were generally unavailable. Moreover, because of the shortage of women, marriage came to be more a cause of conflict than a consolidator of kinship bonds.

105 Not only was the family world of the Trumaí crumbling, but all lines of authority and social control were weak. The Trumaí seemed unable to unite for such culturally approved purposes as economic cooperation or hospitality. Trumaí leadership, like that of many primitive peoples, was predicated on the existence of strong bonds of kinship, economic interdependence, and a general agreement on goals and policies. These preconditions were no longer found among the Trumaí. In this structural vacuum, the Trumaí chief was less and less able to cope with the growing self-assertiveness of certain men, and was increasingly forced into a neutral role. As the community weakened, his position weakened.

105 A number of reasons account for the factionalism which developed within the Trumaí village. Some are a function of personality, others of the diminished population. Obviously women were at a premium and many men were compelled to do without mates. The resultant competition was, as we have seen, a festering sore in the body politic. Connected with it, but having further ramifications, the bonds of kinship and the expected behavior between kinsmen underwent attrition and upset what social balance could have been achieved under more normal conditions. Indeed fear of the outside world more than internal forces of cohesion held the Trumaí community together.

Other integrative mechanisms in Trumaí culture were also disappearing. Conspicuous among them was the gradual abandonment of many elements in the Trumaí ceremonial cycle. (Significantly this left the highly individual practice of shamanism as the most active religious expression in Trumaí culture). In part, this loss may have been due to the inability of the Trumaí to amass a sufficiently large food surplus for the feasting that was required when visitors from other tribes were present. Not enough is known about the ritual of the Trumaí to warrant any broad generalizations on the effects of depopulation on ceremonial participation, but their numbers may well have been approaching the minimum necessary to carry out the rites. Only a few men who had depended heavily on one old man for their instruction possessed the requisite ceremonial knowledge. When this old man died, Trumaí culture must have suffered a severe blow. Younger men were little interested in learning the ritual and lore. Moreover, the small number of bearers of

1:Murphy and Quain E-4,5 (1938) 1955
SP23 Trumai SP23

Trumaí culture and the shortness of their average life span must have seriously interfered with the instruction of the young. In addition, the very eclecticism of Trumaí culture militated against conservatism and is indicative of the low value which they placed on their own culture.

In the chapter on religion, the disinterest of the people in their religious activities was often noted. Such behavior may appear paradoxical, but ethnographic literature provides many instances of the decline of traditional belief systems in the face of cultural crisis. In the case of the Trumaí, disinterest in the religious sphere was closely related to disinterest in other aspects of their culture. The Trumaí world view had become a philosophy of despair. While depopulation was causing social and cultural disintegration, cultural factors in their turn were furthering depopulation. The Trumaí were set in a steady downward spiral.

In summary it can be said that, on the basis of Quain's notes, the Trumaí were an anxiety ridden people. They were extremely sensitive and their feelings were easily hurt. They demanded individual recognition and attention. They were disinclined to work in their own interest or to join with each other in community projects. Apathetic towards their own world, they were distrustful of the world outside. These observations find considerable confirmation in de Lima's comments on the Trumaí:

> The behavior of this tribe which lives today in a state of humiliation and withdrawal in the face of the other peoples, is quite different from that of the Tupians. They are extremely distrustful Indians; they do not have a frank and happy expression and no matter how long one lives with them they remain always shut off. They do not have the dynamism, nor the disposition to work of the Kamayurá.[6]

It seems certain that this personality structure was not a survival of their more prosperous pre-contact period, when the Trumaí enjoyed some renown as warriors, but was a product of the growing distress which emerged during the period when the their whole security system of the individual — kinship and community — was breaking down. Under the new circumstances the individual Trumaí was no longer lodged in the matrix of the extended family. No longer did the rules of kinship that had formerly guided interpersonal relations operate smoothly for him. No longer did a vigorous community intervene between him and the outside world. There was no strong family, community, or tradition with which he could identify himself. The weakening of the socio-cultural structure precipitated him into conflict with his fellows; and it caused him to transfer some of his dependence to other and stronger groups. And in this effort also, he was unsuccessful, for other tribes looked down upon him as a member of an irredeemably inferior group.

[6] De Lima 1949, p. 25.

1:Murphy and Quain E-4,5 (1938) 1955
SP23 Trumai SP23

105
626
578
[622]
[623]
[622]

"Angry stylized quarreling is a legal device. The village hoots in derision at him whose argument is poor. The chief must be a master at this kind of argument, but all men and even women participate .... Though everyone makes speeches, it is only the chief who makes executive speeches. Quarrels have always been about women, with the exception of the one which occurred upon my arrival in the village (one party disapproved of me...). The chief does not interfere in personal quarrels. The other men sit quietly in the center of the village smoking and trying to disregard the quarrel, which may be going on over their very heads. When the contenders have retired from the village green, they are perfectly calm. The argument is suspended until it can be carried on publicly. There seem to be no secret alliances among the men.

105
182
771
796

"Another thing I must mention is the complete lack of emotional content in religious ceremonies. These are mildly pleasant chores. Although their structure is designed for a public pageant, nobody pays attention."